

10 carols everyone should sing this Christmas by Keith Getty



Keith Getty explains why he believes singing these carols together will help us connect with the real meaning of Christmas

Hustle. Bustle - It's all too easy to look up at the end of December and – *poof* – like excess glitter in the floor that fell from some cheap ornament, the moment gets vacuumed up or packed away for next year like another decoration.

So this Christmas, how can we truly *be present* and not just *buy presents*?

The answer is surprisingly found in the most fundamental of places – in singing traditional carols together. Redemption drew a baby breath that first chilly Christmas night, offering eternal breath to a forlorn world dying to be rescued. And yet even before Jesus lay snuggled up in the manger, the miraculous story of rescue was already being sung about. Mary sang about him in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-51). Zechariah sang about him in the Benedictus (Luke 1:68-79). And of course, on the night of his birth, the skies over Shepherds' Field became a vertical stage for hosts of choiring angels.

We have literally been created, compelled and commanded to sing, thus it's no surprise that the oldest Christmas traditions are the masterpieces of the hymns: the carols. Here are ten timeless hymns none of us should ever forget.

1. Hark! The herald angels sing

Penned by Charles Wesley and included in his 1739 Methodist hymnal, it was later set to music by Felix Mendelssohn. It began as, "Hark, How All the Welkin Rings," but George Whitefield did us all a favour by changing the words to 'Hark! The herald angels sing'.

2. Come thou long expected Jesus

This appeared in Charles Wesley's book of 18 Christmas songs in 1745, and it's one of my three favourite hymns today. Imagine the centuries of waiting, longing and weeping coming to their fruition when people – and indeed all of us today – can find our ultimate supernatural rest in Christ. "Israel's strength and consolation / Hope of all the earth thou art / Dear desire of every nation / Joy of every longing heart."

3. O come, all ye faithful

This one is a Christmas call to worship, mostly likely written by John Francis Wade, a Catholic artist who created beautiful manuscripts decorated with exquisite floral images. His hymn, 'Adeste Fidelis', remained a Latin masterpiece for a hundred years before being translated into English by Rev Frederick Oakeley. For congregational and acapella purposes, this carol sings beautifully.

4. In the bleak midwinter

This carol is among our most plaintive, partly because of the haunting melody by Gustav Holst. Penned by English poet, Christina Rossetti, the lyrics first appeared in 1872. The last stanza says it all: "What can I give Him, poor

as I am? / If I were a Shepherd I would bring Him a lamb; / If I were a Wise Man I would do my part, / Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.”

5. Joy to the world

With its triumph cadence and rousing spirit, this carol was written by the man who is frequently called the ‘Father of the English hymn’, Isaac Watts. It was published in 1719 and wasn’t even originally considered a Christmas carol.

6. O come, O come Emmanuel

This is a medieval Latin hymn dating from the 800s. It was one of a series of antiphons that were sung every December, and it isn’t hard to imagine the mystic beauty of this hymn echoing off the walls of remote monasteries during the Middle Ages. This particular antiphon was discovered by an English minister and musician named John Mason Neale, who rendered it into English and published it in 1851.

7. Joy has dawned upon the world

This a hymn Stuart Townend and I wrote back in 2004. Stuart wanted to draw out parts of the Christmas story, such as the gifts of the magi, that aren’t particularly present in other Christmas

hymns. Melodically, we wanted to give this carol the same fit and feel people might expect from classic Christmas songs they sang growing up in church.

8. Angels we have heard on high

This has one of the most joyful and well written choruses ever composed. The lyrical journey shines a light on the reality of incarnation in a way that refreshes the soul each time you sing it.

9. O little town of Bethlehem

Such a well-known carol, this was inspired by a visit to Bethlehem by Phillips Brooks, a pastor from Philadelphia. Around 1867, Brooks wrote the lyrics and passed them along to the church's worship leader, Lewis Redner, who composed the melody. It was first sung by a group of six Sunday school teachers and 36 children.

10. Once in Royal David's City

While this might be one of the least known of these ten carols, we mustn't lose its message or music. Cecil Frances Alexander was an Irish pastor's wife who published this carol for children in 1848. Today, many consider her

works too deep to sing in adult congregations. If ever we needed empirical evidence that the Irish actually did save civilisation, this may actually be it.

Singing these carols together reminds us that hope has dawned in the little town of Bethlehem, in Royal David's city, and that we should all join the triumph of the skies.

Keith Getty, together with his wife, Kristyn, is globally recognised as a modern hymn-writer. Their latest book is [*Sing! – How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family & Church*](#). For a free download of the carols 'Joy has dawned upon the world' and 'In the bleak midwinter' mentioned above, please visit www.gettymusic.com/merrychristmas.

World Meeting of Families 2018 share the 'Joy of Love' with special family Christmas card

In preparation for the 9th World Meeting of Families in Dublin next August, WMOF2018 is spreading a message of joy and love this



Christmas through a special Christmas card that has been made available for family homes.

The card is based on the official WMOF2018 'Icon of the Holy Family' which is currently journeying to each of the 26 dioceses of Ireland – to encourage reflection and prayer in preparation for the World Meeting of Families. The 'Icon of the Holy Family' is accompanied by petition boxes, enabling families to write intentions and prayers.

Contemplative communities around Ireland will pray for the intentions collected during the coming year.

Due to unprecedented demand more than 700,000 of the Christmas Icon cards have been distributed to parishes for distribution to families at Christmas Masses. The cards have also been made available to religious orders and missionaries in Ireland through AMRI.

WMOF2018 has also linked in with the chaplaincy to the Defence Forces to send 700 copies of the card to Irish men and women serving overseas. More than 35,000 copies of the card were distributed to dioceses in England and Wales.

Commenting on the Christmas card initiative, Father Tim Bartlett, Secretary General of WMOF2018 said, “Pope Francis has asked that in the lead up to WMOF2018, families would be offered an opportunity to reflect on his document *Amoris Laetitia* (*The Joy of Love*). We currently have a programme of preparation in place for parishes and for families and our Icon is part of that programme.

“Our Christmas card is a replica of the beautiful Icon of the Holy Family that we have commissioned for use as part of our reflections on *Amoris Laetitia*. When the doors of the Icon are closed, it looks like a house with front doors. When the doors are opened we see inside the Holy Family sharing a meal, and to left and right,

the Raising of Jairus' Daughter and the Wedding Feast of Cana. On the base of the Icon is the inscription '*Amoris Laetitia*' (*The Joy of Love*), the title of Pope Francis' exhortation on love in the family, the source of our reflections during WMOF2018."

Father Bartlett continued, "The Icon card also includes the official prayer for next year's WMOF2018 and is designed in such a way that it can be set up on the mantelpiece and used throughout the year or used as the prayer before the family sits down to Christmas dinner this year.

"Every home in the country will have the opportunity to receive one of our family Icon Christmas cards which parishes will make available at Masses on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. We are delighted with the demand for these cards which is unprecedented.

"My hope is that families will take the card home from Masses over Christmas and use it as a source of family prayer and reflection as we continue our preparations for WMOF2018."

Dublin, Ireland, has been chosen by Pope Francis to host the next World Meeting of Families from 21-26 August 2018, guided by the

theme “The Gospel of the Family: Joy for the World”. Held every three years, this major international event brings together families from across the world to celebrate, pray and reflect upon the central importance of marriage and the family as the cornerstone of our lives, of society and of the Church.

See www.worldmeeting2018.ie for more information.

Irish Presbyterian missionary and Bible translator dies

The death has taken place of Mary Steele, who served in Ghana as a missionary with Wycliffe Bible Translators for over 50 years.

Mary, who was a member of Killymurrish Presbyterian Church in Ballymena Presbytery, died on 20th December and was well-known throughout the Presbyterian Church in Ireland for her long-term devotion to Bible translation and literacy work.

In 2006 this work was recognised by the Queen when Mary was honoured with an MBE for services to linguistics, literacy and Bible translation in Ghana. In 2015 the President of



Ghana appointed her as a Member of the Order of the Volta, a national order of merit.

Rev. Uel Marrs, secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Council for Global Mission said, "While saddened to learn of Mary's passing we do give thanks to God for her life and witness, including over 50 years of dedicated missionary service in which she contributed so much to language development and spiritual

formation in Ghana. Mary was truly inspiration to so many.”

Mary began her service overseas in 1962 with Wycliffe Bible Translators – an organisation whose vision is to see the Scriptures available to all people in their own language.

Describing Mary as “one of the true ‘legends’ of Wycliffe”, Ricky Ferguson of [Wycliffe Bible Translators](#) in Northern Ireland said, “Mary was greatly loved and admired by so many both in Ghana and at home. She worked extensively on the Konkomba and Bimoba translation projects in the north of the country, facing a variety of challenges, including health issues and serious inter-ethnic conflict.

“Both of these language groups now have completed Bibles, and have seen significant church growth. In addition, Mary was instrumental in a wide range of literacy, Scripture Engagement and Community Development activities, all of which were of significant benefit to these communities. Mary also served as a translation consultant to a number of other projects. She was a much-loved and highly valued member of the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation.

“Asked in a BBC Northern Ireland interview about her work, Mary declared ‘I love the work. I love the people and I love the Lord.’”

A service of thanksgiving for Mary’s life will be held in [Killymurris Presbyterian Church](#), (175 Dunminning Road, Glarryford BT44 9PW) today, Friday, 22 December at 1pm.

Funeral for rector’s son who died in US

The funeral has taken place in Dungannon of the 25-year-old Tynan man who died suddenly in the US earlier this month.

Philip Hagan, the son of Church of Ireland rector Rev Matthew Hagan, was discovered by emergency services at his Philadelphia apartment on December 9 after he failed to turn up for work at Cigna Health Care.

Friday’s funeral service at St Andrew’s Parish Church, Killyman was conducted by Rev Robert Boyd, with a tribute paid to Philip by his brother Jonathan.

Philip was former deputy head boy at Royal School Dungannon, achieving 10 A* grades at



GCSE and then two A* and one A grade at A-level in 2011 before gaining a degree in Actuarial Science from Heriot-Watt University.

The Hagan family had requested donations in lieu of flowers to go to the Kevin Bell Repatriation Trust – the organisation that assisted in bringing Philip’s remains back to Northern Ireland – and to the Southern Area Hospice in Newry.

Last week, a heartbroken Rev Hagan told the News Letter that his much-loved son was “very close to the family” and was due home for Christmas last weekend.

“He was such an intelligent, loving, friendly and conscientious young man who had his whole life ahead of him,” Rev Hagan said.

Archbishop Justin Welby attacks 'harmful' gambling machines

Fixed odds betting terminals (FOBTs) cause "great harm", the Archbishop of Canterbury said as he urged people to support demands that maximum stake limits on the machines are drastically cut.

Most Rev Justin Welby is among Church of England leaders who hope a public consultation will prompt the Government introduce a £2 cap.

Posting on Twitter, he said: "Fixed Odds Betting Terminals cause great harm to vulnerable people, their families and communities. "It's time to fix the legal loophole."

The Gambling Minister Tracey Crouch announced a twelve-week consultation at the end of November on proposed changes to the industry, including new controls to stop gambling firms using advertising to target children.



In February, members of the Church's governing General Synod body unanimously approved cutting the maximum stake on FOBTs, and new powers for councils to control the number of machines on high streets.

Bishop of St Albans Dr Alan Smith, who supports the proposed measures said at the time of the consultation's launch: "The presence of FOBTs on high streets and damage they do to individuals, families and communities should concern us all.

"I hope everyone takes the time to make their voices heard in this consultation.

"Large corporate interests will do everything they can to influence the Government's decision on the maximum stake for FOBTs, so is essential that ordinary people share their local experience of these machines."

Pope criticises the Vatican's 'traitors of trust'

The Pope issued a stinging criticism of the Vatican's top administration yesterday, saying "traitors" were standing in the way of his reforms.

For the fourth year running, Pope Francis used his Christmas greetings to the Curia, the Roman Catholic Church's central bureaucracy, to lecture the assembled cardinals, bishops and other department heads on the need for change.

"Reforming Rome is like cleaning the Sphinx of Egypt with a toothbrush," he said, quoting a 19th-century Belgian churchman. The phrase did not evoke much mirth when the Pope read it in



The Pope used his Christmas greetings as a lecture on the need for change

the Clementina Hall of the Vatican's Apostolic Palace.

Since his election in 2013, the Pontiff has been trying to reform the Italian-dominated Curia to bring the Church's hierarchy closer to its members, to enact financial reforms and guide it out of scandals that marked the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI, his predecessor. But he has encountered resistance, particularly as some departments have been closed, merged or streamlined.

He said some in the bureaucracy – whose members are entrusted with carrying out the Pope’s decisions – were part of “cliques and plots”. He called this “unbalanced and degenerate” and a “cancer that leads to a self-referential attitude”.

In his address, the Pope spoke of those “traitors of trust” who had been entrusted with carrying out reforms but “let themselves be corrupted by ambition and vainglory”. However, he said the majority of Curia members were faithful, competent, and some saintly.

Later, in a meeting with lay Vatican employees and their families, he asked forgiveness for the failings of some Church officials.

He spoke hours before the funeral of Cardinal Bernard Law, the ex-archbishop of Boston, who resigned in disgrace after covering up years of sexual abuse of children by priests and whose name became a byword for scandal in the Catholic Church.

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